



# TASK

**CANADA Postwar Reconstruction**

**by Fred Lasserre**

**1948**

NO.  $\frac{7}{8}$  1948



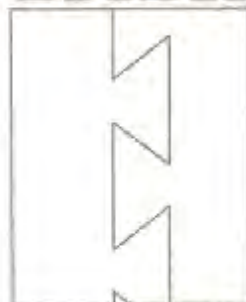


# TASK

NO.  $\frac{7}{8}$  1948



# TASK



*TASK, 1948.  
Post Office Box 117  
Cambridge 38, Mass.  
Issue: Number 7-8  
Price: One dollar.  
Copyright 1948 by  
TASK.*

*Neither the Editorial Council  
nor the staff necessarily share  
the views expressed by the  
authors.*

*Art Adviser*  
Gyorgy Kepes

*Editorial Council*  
Catherine Bauer  
T. J. Kent, Jr.  
Ald. Robert E. Merriam  
J. L. Sert  
Christopher Tunnard  
Robert C. Weaver

*Editor*  
Martin Meyerson

*Associate Editors*  
Louis Dolbeare  
Margy Ellin Meyerson

*Editorial Assistants*  
Henry N. Cobb  
Clifford C. Ham, Jr.  
Norman Klein  
Lawrence Livingston, Jr.  
T. J. Palmer

*Text Layout*  
Larz Anderson  
Judith Turner

*Photographic Layout*  
Claude Stoller  
Ernst Hacker  
Stanley Sherman

*Circulation*  
Sylvia Barger  
J. L. Eldredge

This is the first postwar issue of TASK.

The original impetus for TASK came from students and teachers in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was founded before the war to examine the physical, social and economic aspects of city and resources planning, and of housing and architecture. It aimed to establish the broadest exchange of information, ideas, and experiences among architects, planners, housers, other professionals, students, and those generally interested in these and related fields. Before its publication was suspended during the war, six issues were published, the last three in New York, where Henry H. Reed, Jr. generously assumed the responsibility for them.

TASK has been revived because of the frequent requests of people who feel a need for the stimulus and factual material which such a publication can offer. TASK's readers and friends have believed that a forum such as TASK can help to formulate and express a higher standard of demand than prevails at present for homes, communities and architecture, and for the planning of cities, regions and the nation. They also feel that TASK's value as a medium of expression for students and new authors and as a provoker of controversy and new ideas should be preserved and strengthened.

Thus TASK has been revived. Whether it will flourish will depend on you, its friends and readers. The direction it takes also will depend on you. TASK has striven for ever broader representation — in ideas, authors and audience. It needs suggestions and active support.

It has been suggested by some that TASK concentrate on single-purpose issues, as does this edition. Among the subjects proposed are: politics and planning, civic design and aesthetics, industrial location and buildings, national planning and regional resources development.

Annual, semi-annual and quarterly publication has been variously proposed. Among the policy suggestions is one that TASK be an annual summary and critique of the planning and architectural developments of the year.

We all must realize that the frequency of publication depends on the support TASK receives. This issue is an annual (serving as an equivalent of two issues of the former TASK), supported largely by the generosity of individual financial donors and voluntary editorial efforts. Though again published in Cambridge where it originated, students although greatly interested were in general, under the pressure of postwar education, unable to assist TASK extensively. Also it is doubtful whether, with irregular financial support, and without institutional affiliation, TASK can appear regularly.

Prior to publication, inquiries were sent to those of TASK's subscribers whose addresses might have changed during the interim period. Comments were sought on return postcards. Although there were some chiding, and often unfortunately true, remarks on the circulation operations of TASK, such as, "I wrote you and never heard from you at all", the consensus was that a revived TASK would be welcomed as a most valuable supplement to the other journals in architecture, planning and related fields. Not all were as extravagant in praise as the man who wrote, "I think TASK is the best magazine in the world", but card after card stated, "look forward to this issue with great eagerness", or, "so glad that TASK will be out again". A minister from the state of Washington wrote, "I wish to continue indefinitely". Encouraging cards came from silversmiths, sociologists, interior decorators, doctors, clergymen, industrialists, real estate and commercial firms, government officials, labor union officials and many others of diverse interests, as well as from architects and planners.

Such encouragement has prompted TASK to reappear. Its future will be determined by your desires and participation.

## CONTENTS

Cover *Gyorgy Kepes*

Page 3 **Reconstruction** *Catherine Bauer*

---

### **Reconstruction:**

- 7 **The Hague** *Willem M. Dudok*
- 17 **Belgium** *Adolphe Puissant*
- 20 **Great Britain** *Jaqueline Tyrwhitt*
- 25 **USSR** *Hans Blumenfeld*
- 34 **France** *Catherine Bauer*
- 35 **Germany** *Walter Gropius*
- 37 **Italy** *E. G. Faludi*
- 43 **Poland** *Henry N. Cobb*
- 47 **Warsaw** *Helene and Szymon Syrkus*  
*Matthew Nowicki*
- 50 **The Sudan** *Abdel Saleh*
- 52 **Latin America** *Francis Vioich*
- 57 **Canada** *Fred Lasserre*
- 63 **Bizerte** *P. A. Emery*
- 66 **Tokyo** *Charles A. Beard*
- 73 **UNESCO** *Julian Huxley*
- 74 **IFHTP** *Morris H. Hirsh*
  
- 75 **The Housing Impasse** *Richard F. Wall*
- 79 **On Genuine Education** *Joseph Hudnut*
- 84 **Architecture and Art** *Christopher Tunnard*
- 85 **The Press and Planning** *Frederick Gutheim*
- 86 **On Arrival** *John Bayley*
- 88 **Planning Notes** *C. Eric Carlson*
- 92 **Bibliography** *Sam Spielvogel*
- 95 **Cumulative Index**

## RECONSTRUCTION: CANADA

**Fred Lasserre**

THE veteran returning to his wife or to his family in Canada has found much the same overcrowding and urban blight that exist in the United States. To obtain privacy for his family life he has "taken over" and "squatted" in barracks, in dormitories, in unused residences and stores, and in large hotels. He has made his home in trailers, railway cars, abandoned factories and other buildings.

The veteran has also brought back with him memories of the mature and planned quality of European cities and of their architecture. He has been shocked to see the wasteful chaos and sordid squalor of our so called "New World" towns and cities. He has felt that opportunities were being lost, that a beautiful landscape as being blighted; he has felt that with planning we might do something to avoid an extension of the blight and to regenerate what we already have. He has given voice to his feelings; an opening has been made for citizen participation in community planning.

The Minister of Reconstruction and Supply, Mr. C. D. Howe, has stated that Canada should build nearly half a million houses during the next five years. A government advisory committee has estimated that slightly over 600,000 dwelling units are required to cover the backlog of housing needs (actual shortage and replacement of sub-standard accommodations). In addition there is an annual need for from 50,000 to 60,000 new dwelling units.

Housing construction has in no way approached the annual figure required by the minimum estimate. Mr. Howe's department gives as a figure of 48,599 dwelling units for 1946 and of 63,637 for 1947. The high cost of construction as well as the continued shortage of materials is making the figure for 1947 lag behind the goal. At this rate, in five years we shall build only about 350,000 dwellings.

In spite of the above official figures we have two significant factors which color the Canadian housing picture. In the words of a Toronto real estate agent, "The shortage is increasing year by year and we're not even keeping up with the normal annual population increase, much less reducing the 15-year backlog in building homes." He also expressed the concern which is general throughout this country and which was typified at the annual meeting of mayors and reeves of municipalities where housing was considered Canada's No. 1 problem, "...the small wage-earner, the greater part of Canada's working population, has little chance to obtain a new home at today's prices." Shortages and costs are still the increasing concern of the government's Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation which

*Fred Lasserre is Head, Department of Architecture, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. He has taught at McGill University, practiced with Tecton, Architects in London, England, and is an active participant in the housing and planning movement in Canada.*

handles Canada's housing problems for the Department of Reconstruction and Supply.

Over 60 percent of the households in Canada cannot afford to pay over \$25 a month for rent. In spite of this condition no subsidized housing has been undertaken by the government which is making every effort to keep its hands clean of this "dangerous" type of government "participation." To avoid what is a most necessary "participation" it has, through the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, attempted almost every other conceivable scheme of governmental assistance to home builders.

Two out of every five dwellings built in 1946 obtained government assistance under one or more of the public programs summarized as follows:

### I. *National Housing Act, 1944 and 1946*

A. Housing for Home Owners: Part I of the National Housing Act provides that the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation may enter into contracts with approved lending institutions to make joint loans and to arrange certain guarantees by the Dominion against losses under four different plans designed to stimulate housing for home ownership: (1) loans to owner-occupiers, (2) loans to builders who intend to sell to owner-occupiers, (3) loans to builders who agree to sell to veteran owner-occupiers at a price fixed at a moderate level by Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation — a plan known as the "Integrated Housing Plan", and (4) loans to cooperatives for owner occupancy.

B. Housing for Rental Purposes: Part II of the National Housing Act provides that the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation may enter into contracts with approved lending institutions to make joint loans, to arrange certain guarantees by the Dominion against losses, and to recommend grants designed to encourage the construction of rental housing. Seven plans are under way or contemplated: (1) loans to owners of rental property, (2) loans to builders who intend to sell rental property to prospective owners, (3) loans to builders who agree to sell rental properties at a price fixed at a moderate level by Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, with priority being given to veterans (the multiple dwelling version of the "Integrated Housing Plan"), (4) loans to limited-dividend corporations for low-rental housing purposes, including a special scheme operated by Housing Enterprises of Canada, Limited, an institutional holding company owned by various life insurance companies, (5) loans for rental premises to borrowers engaged in mining, lumbering, logging or fishing, (6) guarantees to life insurance companies for approved rental projects involving the direct in-

vestment of their funds, and (7) grants-in-aid by the Minister for slum clearance projects.

C. Home Extension Loans: Loan guarantees for home extensions are provided under Part IV of the National Housing Act. Operations under this section commenced on April 1st, 1946, with proclamation of this section. Home extension under this section usually provides one or more new dwelling units.

It is worth saying a word about the government's pet baby born amidst much fanfare two years ago, Housing Enterprises, Limited. Long ago the government admitted, and still does, that there is no such thing as low-cost or low-rental housing. So it bludgeoned the insurance companies, by threats and promises, into establishing the above company to build moderate-rental accommodations. This company has built the largest number of dwellings under any of the government's lending schemes. Now Housing Enterprises has thrown in the sponge. Its whole program for 1947 has been abandoned because the rents it charged for minimum accommodation at \$45.00 to \$65.00 were not high enough to cover construction costs and adequate operating returns. Even "moderate-rental" accommodations have proved impossible to build under the present economy.

The Conservative-Liberal coalition paper, the *Vancouver Sun*, stated editorially, commenting on this collapse: "Semi-luxury housing remains, then, as the only type available — luxurious in the sense of price category. And when a necessity becomes a luxury, both the government and the building industry had better be warned that the public will not tolerate a condition of that kind for long.

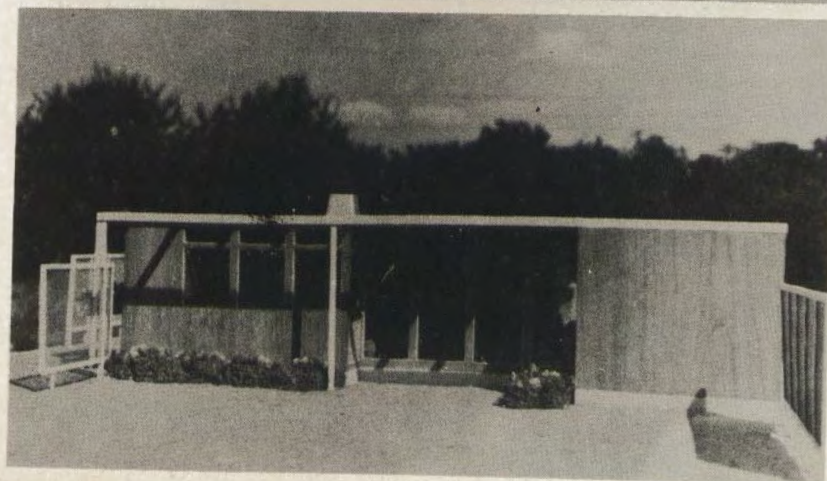
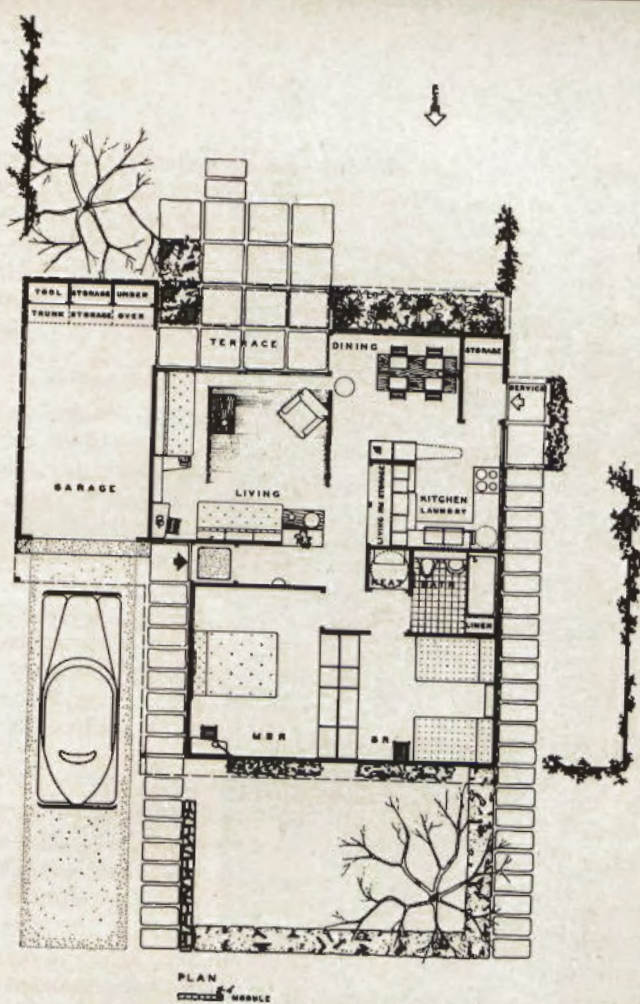
"If the industry can't get its prices down within reach of the great majority of its potential customers, it will have to go out of business as soon as it exhausts its upper-crust market. The necessity for action is becoming more critical.

"Demand for government moves to meet the shortcomings of the free-enterprise system is also growing louder with the passing months. Canadians in this enlightened age simply refuse to believe that an adequate peacetime standard of housing is beyond the capacity of a nation which set production records in wartime. They are apt to insist on changing either the government or the system — or both."

### II. *Veterans' Land Act, 1942*

Housing operations under the Veterans' Land Act are rural and semi-rural in nature. The legislation provides financial assistance to veterans intending to engage in farming as a full-time occupation or in part-time farming coupled with industrial, commercial, or other employment from





*Demonstration model house constructed from prefabricated panel system developed at the National Research Council, Ottawa; D. C. Simpson, Architect.*



which the veteran derives his principal cash income. Six plans are currently in operation, but house-building activity has been highest in the first two: A. subdivision projects, B. small holdings, C. full-time farming, D. commercial fishing, E. provincial lands, and F. grants to Indian veterans.

### III. *Canadian Farm Loan Act, 1927*

The Canadian Farm Loan Act was enacted by Parliament in 1927 to meet the demand for improved agricultural credit facilities in long-term mortgages. This legislation, as amended, has been administered by the Canadian Farm Loan Board, commencing in January 1929. Loans may be made to farmers for the purpose of paying debts, purchasing livestock and farm equipment, making farm improvements, erecting new buildings, repairing buildings, providing for the expense of farm operation, and assisting in the purchase of additional farm land.

### IV. *Farm Improvement Loans Act, 1944*

In August, 1944, The Farm Improvement Loans Act, 1944, was enacted to provide intermediate and short-term credit to farmers for the improvement and development of farms and living conditions on farms.

### V. *Emergency Shelter Regulations*

In January 1946, administration of the Emergency Shelter Order was transferred from the Wartime Prices and Trade Board to the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. For the most part, these shelter units were provided by Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation in cooperation with municipalities and universities by conversion of barracks and other available buildings.

These units, accounting for about twelve percent of the new dwellings in 1946, can hardly, legally and morally, be called "new". Where once twelve soldiers lived, one family now lives. A house condemned as unfit for human habitation has been made "livable".

### VI. *Wartime Housing Limited*

Construction activity during 1946 of the Crown company, Wartime Housing, Limited, returned to the peak level attained during 1942 and 1943, at which time its main function was to provide housing accommodation for workers in those parts of Canada where war industries had created a serious housing shortage. Current operations of the company are directed towards the construction of low-rental homes for veterans.

This company is probably the brightest spot in the whole housing picture. It accounted for eleven percent of dwellings built in 1946. Due to

economies arising out of mass production and advanced building techniques and the company's ability to obtain land from municipalities for one dollar, rentals have been kept in the range of twenty-two to thirty-five dollars a month for well-built and adequate two- to four-bedroom accommodations. Also, attempts have been made to develop housing on a community basis, including communal facilities and amenities.

Official housing surveys being conducted by the government in Toronto and Vancouver will be valuable in establishing barometers and standards for slum clearance, re-housing, urban rehabilitation and community planning. A similar survey of rural housing is being conducted in the Prairie Provinces and one is planned for British Columbia. Considerable research has been carried out in the National Research Council on new building materials and on methods of construction. Special emphasis has been given to the construction and analysis of systems of prefabrication particularly that of the three-foot-four-inch modular panel type. A very good jointing system has been developed by the Council. Unfortunately the Government is withholding the very favorable results of tests on full-scale models; one suspects pressure-group interests.

Planning legislation of one form or another has been passed in all Canadian provinces. This legislation is well written, broad in scope, very detailed in its coverage—and impotent. Its impotence arises from the fact that foreign legislation was literally transplanted to Canada without translating it into the peculiarities of the Canadian legal pattern.

In the last three years city after city prepared, or had prepared for it, master plans, zoning ordinances and model planning by-laws. As far as the author knows, almost all of the material prepared is gathering dust.

Most of the city plans are prepared by consultants—individuals or firms—who are brought in to "do a job". Vancouver, the first city in Canada to have a comprehensive town plan, employed American consultants, Harland Bartholomew and Associates. All other cities have employed Canadian firms to do the work for them, or in a few cases have used their own planning commissions. The notable exception is Ottawa which has obtained the services of the French *urbaniste* Jacques Greber, to advise it on the planning of the capital and the Federal District. Town Planning Consultants, Limited, with its head office in Toronto, has prepared plans for a number of cities and is the best known firm of Canadian town planners. Its managing director, Dr. E. G. Faludi, was a well-known European architect and planner before the war. In a few cases cities already having plans have revised

these in terms of new concepts of planning and to satisfy new needs. These revised plans, seem to be the ones which are gathering the least dust. They are being referred to fairly conscientiously in spite of their over-emphasis on traffic and lack of attention to "living," "housing" and "community" requirements.

In Ontario this year, a number of amendments to the Planning and Development Act of 1946 makes the act a powerful weapon for planning both within and outside the municipalities. The minister has practically dictatorial powers in the enforcement of declared intentions for areas outside organized municipalities.

In British Columbia an amendment to the Town Planning Act makes it possible for the Government to go into any unorganized territory, and (a) prescribe principles of subdivision, (h) control land with respect to construction thereon, (c) restrict land use, (d) lay out services. Besides this most interesting and encouraging legislation the government has been acting in a consulting capacity by preparing plans and zoning by-laws for any small municipality desiring this service. It is to the provincial government's credit that it has a staff of far-sighted and progressive planners which is rendering a real service to the municipalities.

Other provinces are similarly revising their planning legislation. The Province of Saskatche-

wan, with a socialist Government, has passed an act which gives the municipalities the most extensive powers of expropriation of any of the provinces.

The difficulties of making town plans effective resulted in a conference sponsored by the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation of the Department of Reconstruction and Supply, to which all those interested in planning were invited to attend. Out of this conference arose an organization known as the Community Planning Association of Canada. It is a self-governing body "to foster public understanding of, and participation in, community planning in Canada". Through it the citizen, it is hoped, will have a closer link with the planning ideas and processes which affect his environment. Branches have been formed in all the provinces. Active groups in the major cities make this one of North America's most healthy vehicles for democratizing the planning process. Funds are made available to the organization from the government. The central office at Ottawa is a clearing house for all ideas and developments in the field of planning from community to regional efforts. This information is relayed throughout the country by the Association's eye-catching publication *Layout for Living*. The efforts being made in the field of planning indicate the growing consciousness of the need to plan in the Canadian citizen and in his government.